

***Are you a non-traditional student?  
Chances are you are taking courses to improve your  
life and or job.***



The term nontraditional student is not a precise one, although age and part-time status are common defining characteristics (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) study examining the relationship between nontraditional status and persistence in post secondary education identified nontraditional students using information on their enrollment patterns, financial dependency status, and persistence in secondary education. They identified the following characteristics:

- Delays enrollment
- Attend part time for at least part of the academic year
- Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled
- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid
- Has dependents other than a spouse
- Is a single parent
- Does not have a high school diploma

Did you know you are part of a growing number of adults over the age of 25 who are returning to school? Presently, adult students make up approximately one third of college students nationwide and this figure is expected to increase (to over 6.4 million by 2007). There are many reasons adult students choose to return to school, including personal development, career change, change in life situation, and many others. Regardless of the circumstances, most adult students find the experience to be rewarding. At Savannah State University, we believe you have made a good choice and that your experience at SSU will be valuable and rewarding.

## **CONCERNS**

***While there are many rewards, many adult learners have some concerns about returning to school and making the adjustments to the college experience. Common concerns include:***

- \* The adequacy of their study skills
- \* Their ability to manage time and money
- \* Feelings of isolation on campus
- \* Feelings of intimidation by the college environment
- \* The challenge of juggling career, family, and school responsibilities.

***These are very real concerns and the solutions vary according to the individual student and their circumstances. Despite these concerns, adult students can and do adjust well to the college experience. In fact, adult students have been found to have some advantages over traditional students:***

- \* In part because of their life experience, adult learners tend to be more motivated
  - \* They actually use study time more efficiently
  - \* They have a better idea of their goals for college

*The following information has been compiled to assist the adult learner in making the adjustment to the college experience. Read on for some important and hopefully helpful suggestions.*

## TIPS FOR NON TRADITIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS



Before enrolling...

- 1. Plan ahead!** Review the college catalog for all relevant information. Make a visit to campus to familiarize your-self with the layout, student affairs offices, financial counselor, library, cafeteria, admissions personnel and other helpful departments.
- 2. Get wired!** Make sure you have access to email and the internet. This will give you easy access to many library databases and allow you to do online research. You will also be able to communicate quickly with professors and other students and may be able to send assignments by email if you can't attend class.
- 3. Know your time frame!** Map out your schedule for completing your degree to help yourself set realistic goals and budget your time efficiently. Part time students usually take a longer time to meet their degree requirement.
- 4. Make sure your work schedule can accommodate your class schedule.** Also consider time needed for study and rest.
- 5. Talk with your family or support system** about the upcoming changes and discuss how others may be able to assist you in meeting these social obligations.

You're in...



- 1. Begin with classes you feel confident about.** Don't feel that you have to tackle the most challenging subjects first. Sometimes the easier courses may help you adjust better,

and give you a sense of accomplishment from passing them with higher grades. This will build your confidence and prepare you for the more difficult courses.

**2. Try online classes.** This may give you a more flexible schedule, save you a commute and allow you to work around job and family obligations. Some online classes may be more tedious than coming to class, so ask questions about the requirements before enrolling.

**3. Consider taking summer classes,** but schedule carefully. Most summer semesters are compressed, so it's wise to take fewer classes than you would in a typical term.

**4. Know your drop deadlines and book return policies.** Many schools will not refund your tuition or will refund only a percentage if you drop a course more than one or two weeks into the term and many bookstores will not accept returns after a certain date.

**5. Don't be afraid to meet and get to know other students** – even the 'youngsters.' Walk the yard or spend some time in King Frazier Student Center.

**6. Use faculty office hours!** Take time to get to know all your teachers, get a feel for who they are and what they expect and let them get to know about you and your interests also.

**7. Give yourself plenty of time to complete assignments.** Most teachers will hand out a course syllabus at the beginning of the semester so students will know what to expect; so try to start projects and special assignments early.

**8. Look for departments or organizations designed specifically for older students.** At SSU we have a number of various student organizations and one organization called the Non-traditional Student Association. Participation in these may provide you with information, support and the ability to experience mutual aid from the sharing of like experiences.

**9. Finally, allow yourself room to be human!** Don't try to be something you're not. Many older students try too hard to fit in, joining social clubs and hanging out with the younger students all of the time. You don't have to do this, unless it's something you really want to do. If you want to do it, that's fine. But you don't have to pretend to be "one of the kids." You have a lot to offer by being yourself. Many students will look up to you, admiring your initiative and zeal for balancing career, education and family. Many others will simply look past you, because you don't 'fit in', but that's okay too.